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ABSTRACT

Child care policymakers in Ontario and Michigan were compared in a study of provincial and state political processes and structures that affect child welfare. The two regions were selected due to similarities in their demographic characteristics, economic structures, and Anglo-American cultural commitments. The rationale for the study was that an analysis of political processes could illustrate certain trends in child care policy in North America as a whole, and that an understanding of the relationships among pertinent players in agencies, legislatures, and interest groups could help explain what was feasible in child care policy. The study combined a reputational technique for respondent identification and elite interviewing for data collection. It was found that networks of child care groups have been developing in both Ontario and Michigan for more than a decade, and that although the numbers are small, they have had increasing effectiveness at federal, provincial and state levels. Despite a laissez-faire atmosphere in Michigan, child care advocates have had some legislative sponsorship. It was shown that effective advocacy in Ontario meant avoiding cooptation, while in Michigan, it prevented fragmentation. It is concluded that policy analysis of child care has centered on social values that emphasize the child or cost benefit issues over programming. Contains 7 references. (Author/LB)

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ABSTRACT

This study compares and contrasts child-care policy players in Ontario and Michigan through interviews with twelve key actors in each region. Networks of child-care groups have been developing in both regions for over a decade. While the numbers are small in both places, they have been increasing in effectiveness at federal and provincial/state levels. Ontario child-care advocates are managed by the ministry. Despite a "laissez-faire" atmosphere, Michigan child-care advocates have some legislative sponsorship. Effective advocacy in Ontario means avoiding cooptation while in Michigan it means preventing fragmentation.

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Child-Care Policy Actors in Ontario and Michigan

Child care, which is defined in the present paper as "out-of-home, daytime, organized, (licensed), care for children. . .(Kahn and Kamerman, 1976, p. 10)," is an important social issue in North America. The child-care problem centers on accessibility, affordability and quality. Historically, federal programs in both countries have had a rather limited scope (e.g., the Head Start program in the US) and/or financial support (e.g., the day care subsidies under the Canadian Assistance Plan).

Ontario and Michigan are comparable in certain demographic characteristics (e.g., a large metropolitan area and extensive hinterlands), economic structures (e.g., market economies) and Anglo-American cultural commitments (e.g., democratic political values). Within diverse national systems, provinces and states display wide differences in child-care policy with only a few such as Ontario and Michigan having relatively developed child-care programming (Duane and Bridgeland, forthcoming). Indeed, Michigan had a past policy commitment which has slowed in recent years while Ontario had a relatively smaller past commitment which is rather rapidly expanding lately ("New Directions for Child Care in Ontario," 1987).

The political processes in these two regions could illustrate some trends in child-care policy in North America as a whole. In order to comprehend what is feasible in child-care policy, it is useful to investigate the relationships among pertinent players. Our goal here then is to explore the key child-care actors within agencies, legislatures and especially interest groups.

First, the differences of structure and culture between these two regions ought to affect child-care politics. And, second, there might be some distinctive characteristics such as the variations between child-care experts in each region. Specifically, American ideology has emphasized liberty and competition, while Canadian values have stressed order, loyalty and deference to bureaucratic hierarchy. Therefore, in Ontario child care, governmental agencies could "sponsor" interest groups which then are accommodated or even integrated into decision making (Presthus, 1974). By contrast, Michigan child-care politics might reflect fragmentation among advocacy groups and greater conflict between these advocates and the officials.

In addition, in a parliamentary system, policy-making is found in the elected executive reinforced by a civil-service bureaucracy. Child-care advocates in Ontario might readily marshal resources for legislative change while, at the same time, resisting civil-service manipulation. Whereas in the Presidential system, policy formulation is characterized by tension between the executive and the legislature. The Michigan political

structure requires dispersed activities by child-care groups across agencies and legislative committees. Michigan interest groups are more apt to focus on the legislature than on the state agencies. Finally, the politics child care is likely to exhibit some similarity in both regions. Specifically, child-care advocacy, given its comparative newness, would likely be characterized by small organizations and fluid coalitions.

Method:

This study combines a reputational technique for informant (or herein also called respondent or panelist) identification (Bonjean and Olson, 1974) and elite interviewing for data collection (Dexter, l970). Relative to respondent identification, those with a focus on child-care policy acted as nominators. In particular, these informants encompass the directors of the offices of child care, legislative committee chairs, and advocacy leaders in Michigan and Ontario. The reputational technique consists of asking nominators to name, rank and comment on the leaders and their related organizations (Bonjean and Olson, 1974, pp. 164-166).

In exploring the assessments of these nominators, a "snowball" technique was utilized whereby informants were placed on the panel if they had two or more nominations in a pool of about thirty in Michigan and twenty-five in Ontario. In both regions, there were four cases wherein nominators were sufficiently identified to be part of the informant panel. The final group of respondents consisted of 12 key persons in each region. These informants on both panels include: child-care advocates; legislative persons; agency people and knowledgeable outsiders (i.e., university professors). Specifically, the Michigan panel consists of three agency persons; three legislative people; five advocates and one outsider. In Ontario, the respondent group consists of three ministerial officials; one cabinet staffer; two legislators; five heads of advocacy organizations and one outsider. Once the 24 respondents were identified, they were interviewed either directly or by telephone for about one and one-half hours each throughout 1987 and early 1988. Elite interviewing, such as this, allows the informant to develop the interview and promotes cooperation from the influential (Dexter, 1970, p. 6). Of course, an effort was made to ask identical questions to insure comparability.

Concern for child care has existed for over a decade both inside and outside of government from a small, dedicated, and close-knit group of people. For the most part, their perspectives vary little despite institutional differences. There is no need for positional identification in the present paper, therefore. All of these informants were

questioned: "Who are the child-care policy influentials?" Moreover, we asked: "Is there rivalry between the social service agency and other agencies over child-care programs?" Next: "What is the relative priority of child care v. other programs?" Finally, and centrally: "Which advocacy networks or coalitions have had what level of impact upon child-care policy?"

The Agencies

The limit of control of child-care programming by the Department or Ministry of Social Services is examined first. And relatedly, the involvement by other agencies or ministries in aspects of child care as well as the extent of inter-agency conflict or "turfsmanship" is then explored.

In Michigan, the Department of Social Services (DSS) has the main responsibility for child-care programing (see Table One). It does share some, albeit a small part, of the responsibility with Department of Education (MDE - see Table Two). However,

(Table One about here)

the perceptions of most of the respondents about the conflict over the educationally "at risk" four-year-old legislation provides some evidence of inter-agency program

(Table Two About Here)

fragmentation. Several of the Michigan child-care respondents assert that the MDE began to promote this program for the educationally disadvantaged and attracted key legislators and the Governor even as they were ready to make cuts in the child-care area. This successful legislation appears, to a majority of the panel, to be due to the policy makers believing that such a program could eventually reduce such high-cost remedial ones as aid to dependent children, and corrections. Furthermore, when child-care advocates attempted to assert, at least, a regulatory role for DSS in this program, they were apparently stoutly resisted by the educational lobbyists. The "at risk" four-year-old program was passed in 1988 while child care languishes as discussed below.

The shared perceptions of over half of the Ontario panel about the ministry role, involve some similarities and contrasts with the situation depicted in Michigan. They also see a history of fragmentation in child-care programs which has been made more difficult by bureaucratic inertia and defensiveness over program control. Inactiveness associated with 40 years of Conservative government characterized the situation according to three respondents. Different from Michigan, the Ministry of Community and Social Services (CSS) is seen by several respondents as having gained control over child-care programming (see Table One for structure). Although, there is a small

component of early childhood education in the Ministry of Education (see Table Two), CSS is described as "the center . . . the unit of last resort." Furthermore, the Ontario Child Care Branch, two on the panel assert, has negotiated a major role for itself on "junior kindergartens." They maintain, that each new school must include a child-care unit operated by the CSS; Ontario school administrators were apparently unhappy, but compliant.

Next, the majority of Michigan informants perceive that the child-care unit, known as the Day Care Services Program, has played a tangential role within DSS (see Table One). Its field staff has been eliminated and not restored. This child-care unit has been moved around within DSS and now is under a coordinating unit, the Office of Child and Youth Services (OCYS - see Table One). The standing of the Day Care Services Program within OCYS, over half of the Michigan panel assert, is overshadowed by OCYS's commitment to programs for juvenile crime, foster care and protective services.

The Ontario Child Care Branch seems to have had a similar past, according to several informants, but now it is distinctly different from Michigan. The majority of Ontario interviewees seem to concur with a key advocate that, "it now has a 500% (increased) profile with an expanded staff; greatly increased funding and intensive activism." It is asserted by several Ontario people that the women's movement, in part, accounts for its organizational emergence. Indeed, the Child Care Branch has an important ally in the Women's Directorate, a group lead by the Attorney General, according to two advocates and one agency head.

The Advocates

In the 1970's, there was but one nation-wide organization in the United States: the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Its affiliates were focused on early education and professionalism, not child care and policy activism (Duane, Bridgeland and Stern, 1982). Now a range of advocacy organizations constitute a continuing and active presence in state capitals. All the respondents concur with the following statement by the foremost advocate (and a respondent) in Michigan: "The actors are getting a more 'holistic' perspective about . . . children's programs and the. . . advantage (of policy) coordination." She also asserts that, "there is now a continuous working communication between advocates and policymakers from the initiation through to the implementation of programs. All of the players are really talking to each other . . . and this is building trust as well as a close working relationship." Indeed, the

child-care advocates, four respondents maintain, once focused on program operatives in the DSS, but now spend time with departmental and legislative planners. Advocacy groups are beginning to enter the process earlier, and remaining involved throughout the multiple stages of budget development. They have become analytically and politically sophisticated, according to these four.

All of those on the Michigan panel who addressed the issue of advocacy sophistication, concur that the state-level groups form a set of overlapping circles (Figure One). At the hub, is the Michigan Child Care Task Force. While the Task Force is

(Figure One about here)

structurally rather informal and variable in its membership, its monthly meetings represent the pivotal place involving most of the influential advocates, key agency and legislative people. Specifically, the Task Force was founded a decade ago by the powerful House Social Services Committee chair who continues to give it strong support. Moreover, forming its leadership are three of reputedly most effective child-care lobbyists in the state, according to several respondents. The Task Force is where advocates are briefed on key pertinent developments, exchange information and develop strategies for advocacy.

The core support group in the Task Force is the state-wide Child Care Community Coordination (the 4C's information and referral network - see Figure One). It is a quasi public agency which funds local child-care offices. The single most important of the constituent groups is the Michigan Coalition for Families and Children, according to an overwhelming number of the panel. This latter group has a broad family orientation with child care as only one, albeit a notable, commitment. Several respondents assert that it has had, an important role in developing a children's legislative agenda which is respected by legislators. Another organizational participant, with an even broader agenda, is the Michigan League for Human Services (see Figure One) according to three informants. By reputation, they maintain, the League is the most important social-service group in the state with its research sophistication and its urban and labor support. The Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children (MAEYC) has less policy engagement than the League, according to its head. Its thrust is on professional development and early childhood education. Finally, the most tangential of the child-care players is the Women's Commission set up in the Governor's Office. Its members rarely meet with the Task Force, according to a key participant (and an informant). Nonetheless, the Commission has recently funded the newly redeveloped

4C's Association. The original 4C's Council was disbanded in 1981 during a budget crunch, though the state continued its local funding, according to an agency head.

Michigan child-care advocacy has taken the form of a fluid yet durable coalition of interest groups. Its development was relatively independent from powerful groups (e.g., business and labor) and the executive branch. Nonetheless, they have had a close working relationship with liberal legislative supporters. Indeed, two on the panel, mildly criticize the Task Force for not having really attempted to gain support from conservative legislators and business groups. However, these advocates do receive praise from two non Task Force respondents for their involvement in the Alliance for Better Day Care, a national force behind the child-care legislation currently before Congress.

Similar to the Michigan experience, Ontario has had an overall, central alliance group, the Ontario Coalition for Better Day Care (OCBD). Two long- time OCBD participants assert that the organization, for over a decade has undergone a number of reorganizations and yet is has maintained a cadre of the same leaders (see Figure One). Indeed, two OCBD leaders are the key child-care advocates in the province according to several panel members However, unlike Michigan, it does not have the support of major allied child- care groups. Furthermore, its impact in recent years, according to four respondents, has been enhanced more by outsiders rather than the child-care community. Indeed, powerful outside allies such as the Ontario Federation of Labor and the women's movement have given momentum to child-care expansion. However, the OCBD also receives positive recognition from two key respondents, both for its initial role at the provincial level, and for its support of recent federal legislation. OCBD advocacy, it is asserted by one important actor, is now serving as a model throughout Canada.

The very success of the coalition has, ironically, resulted in some loss of its influence to certain public interest groups. For instance, institutionalized women's organizations are central to the process now, according a majority of the respondents. These groups include the Women's Directorate and the Advisory Council (to government) on Women's Issues. The Directorate is a governmental department charged with reviewing all public policy with a potential impact on women employees. It has pressured heavily to make government a model child-care employer (see Figure One). As stated above, it is seen as having "real power" because its head is the Attorney General. In contrast, the Advisory Council, a publicly-funded and ostensibly independent voice, lacks that level of impact, according to several of the informants. In addi-

tion, two respondents assert that the Coalition for Better Day Care has remained an outside movement with rather less input than it had earlier (see Figure One). Indeed, a key manager in the Child Care Branch states that the Coalition is weak. Therefore, he is seeking public funding for OCBD in order to expand its staff and bring it into the policy-making structure. In sum, Ontario advocacy groups have been overshadowed by public agencies and closely connected interest groups, such as the Women's Directorate. The future impact of child-care advocates appears to be tied to their integration as "sponsored" components within provincial government.

Implications

There are some noteworthy similarities which exist between Ontario and Michigan child-care players. Rather complex networks have been developing in both regions for more than a decade. Also, the organizations for child-care advocacy have remained small and informal in Michigan and Ontario. Both regions evidence some advocacy dependence on government, although varying in degree and in source. Nonetheless, advocates have apparently not only gained increasing effectiveness within their respective regions, but also have had some impact especially at the federal level.

The variations in the relations between the policy actors in Ontario and Michigan tend to confirm some expectations made at the outset of this study especially for Ontario. In Ontario child-care culture, the provincial executive manages the involvement of the advocates: protecting their interests from opponents, helping them find allies and subsidizing their development. While Michigan child-care advocates are decentralized, they are not especially competitive and conflicting. Indeed, they demonstrate some coordination, forming a configuration of overlapping organizations (see Figure One). While laissez- faire may be more of an American pattern, Michigan child-care advocates have not had to go it alone, but have received help from the legislature. Moreover, in direct contrast with Ontario, Michigan exhibits both inter-agency competition (DSS v. MDE) and intra-agency competition (within the DSS, child care v. foster-care programs). Child care is the subordinate program.

Ontario child-care advocates have not only had success within the province, but currently have an influence beyond. And yet, they have little role in the ongoing development of the "New Directions." They will only become so when they gain official status similar to the Women's Directorate and Women's Advisory Council. By contrast, Michigan child-care groups have brought about little policy change, and lack powerful outside allies such as trade unions. Nevertheless with some legislative

assistance, they have been developing a network of people who are increasingly sophisticated advocates.

A parliamentary system tends to have compacts between government and power groups (Presthus, 1974, pp. 13-14, 262-263). For a new lobbying group such as child care, this offers a distinct advantage because there is one center for lobbying: the cabinet. Eventually becoming regularly included in government decisions is not an unrealistic hope. However, there is the danger of the child-care movement being preempted, e.g., by the women's movement, or coopted by governmental bureaucrats. It behooves child-care advocates in such situations to develop linkages with child-care networks elsewhere - federally, and perhaps even internationally - in order to gain influence.

On the other hand, the American system of divided power, presents a number of opportunities such as legislative hearings and agency contacts. And yet, this can lead to a scattering of scarce resources and thereby diminishing overall impact. If child-care advocates are eventually to attain some success within a fragmented system, this requires resourceful leadership who can tolerate modest gains after years of struggle. Also, the Michigan experience seems to indicate that it is not an absolute requisite to be hierarchical in order to be successful.

Not inappropriately, policy analysis on child care has centered on social values which emphasize the child, and/or cost-benefit issues over programming. Clearly, it's the art of the politically possible in child care which has been largely a research unknown. This study of the child-care policy actors is, then, one step in attempting to remedy this situation.

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Child-Care Policy Actors in Ontario and Michigan

TABLE ONE

ONTARIO & MICHIGAN ORGANIZATIONAL TABLE - FOR SOCIAL SERVICES

ONTARIO

Premier

Ministry of Community and Social Services (CSS)

Family Support Services & Income Maintenance Division

Income Maintenance Branch

Child Care Branch

Family Support Branch

MICHIGAN

Governor

Department of Social Services (DSS)

Office of Children and Youth Services (OCYS)

Bureau of Family and Children Services

Special Projects Division

Day Care Services Program

TABLE TWO

ONTARIO & MICHIGAN ORGANIZATIONAL TABLE - FOR EDUCATION

ONTARIO

Premier

Ministry of Education

Education Implementation Unit

Learning Programs

Centre for Early Childhood and Elementary Education

MICHIGAN

Board of Education

Department of Education

Educational Services

School Program Services

Office of Early Childhood Education

FIGURE ONE
ONTARIO AND MICHIGAN CHILD-CARE ADVOCATE GROUPS SOCIOMETRY